

Number of stations to offer natural gas grows

Vehicles burning natural gas will be able to fill up beginning Aug. 29 at a Shell station on Wixom Road south of I-96 in Wixom. Consumers Power Co. will provide natural gas, as it does for a growing number of stations in Michigan.

With the addition of Windmill Truck Stop (near Lansing) and the Shell station in Wixom, the NGV (natural gas vehicle) public fueling infrastructure has grown to 13 stations in the lower peninsula and two in the UP, said Vance G. Anderson, director of NGV programs for Consumers Power, the Jackson-based utility.

"This clean-burning, economical and domestically abundant natural gas is truly becoming a viable fuel option for fleet operators in Michigan," Anderson said.

So far, state government is the chief customer. The departments of Transportation, Natural Resources, Management and Budget, Corrections, and Social Services had 19 NGVs in their fleets last spring with plans to put a total of 95 in by fall.

Reason: Under the 1992 federal Energy Policy Act, state and fed-

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eral governments must acquire or convert 76 percent of their new light-duty vehicles to alternative fuels such as natural gas by the end of the decade.

"We've had tremendous success with NGVs," said Duane Berger, director of the state's motor transport division. He praised NG's clean burning quality.

Second biggest customer is Consumers Power itself. On June 1 it took delivery of five Ford-built trucks, modified by TDM World Conversions in Auburn Hills. TDM is the first company in Michigan and second in the nation to be recognized as a Ford conversion installer.

NG vehicles are driven by meter readers in the Livonia service trucks, modified by TDM. The Pontiac area already has 25 NG vehicles. Consumers Power plans to purchase or convert 30 percent

of its new light-duty vehicles to alternative fuels by 1996; 60 percent by 1997; and 90 percent by 2000.

The Wixom station's grand opening for natural gas will be at 10 a.m. on Aug. 29. Operator is Mark Ambrotjak.

According to a listing by the utility, other public NG stations in the immediate area are Andrews Amoco on University Drive, Auburn Hills; and Speedway on Sheldon Road at Five Mile, Plymouth.

Many alternative fuel fleets have private fueling facilities, but

Consumers Power reports it has been "working aggressively statewide" to build a strong public fueling infrastructure.

Said Ford Motor spokesman Don Kaegi, division fleet sales manager: "We've made tremendous strides in reducing tailpipe

emissions of gasoline vehicles during the past 20 years, and we believe that cooperation between automakers, converters and fuel providers will allow alternative fuels to contribute to continuing this trend."

Meanwhile, the state Senate is considering five bills that would affect NGVs. SB 557 would exempt from the sales tax the difference in price between a gasoline-powered vehicle and an alternative-fueled vehicle. Other bills would provide property, income and single business tax breaks.

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